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Pioneer Homesteads

By JULIA LE CLERC KNOX, Vevay, Ind.

Switzerland county and especially Vevay, is rich in interesting old homesteads. Some of them have been brought up to date but quite a number have been left almost entirely untampered with. A great similarity of architecture prevails, one of the most striking characteristics of which is the exceedingly thick walls, and the strong disregard of any attempt at convenience. Many of these old houses have no inside communication between adjoining rooms. One must go outside to enter the next apartment. The outside stairway leads to upper stories and then there is almost invariably the little squeezed-up portico, like a bird's nest, over the front door, and the built-in cupboards on each side of the open fireplace with its high, wooden mantel.

One of the most interesting old landmarks and one that strikes the eye first, approaching Vevay from the water front, is the old Ferry house. It was in process of building when the first steamer passed down the Ohio and the people who came from miles around to see this wonder of steam power, gathered around the foundation of this building, erected by John Francis Dufour who laid out Vevay and watched the workmen, who probably builded better than they knew for the old house has stood the test of time and high water very successfully and still proudly holds up its head, as one might say. During the annual floods of the Ohio, the water often gets to the top of the mantel in the second story. It is built of cement and looks like an adobe house. It is quaint and picturesque from both front and rear. The side facing the river has the outside stair opening by a trap door on the upper porch. The lower porch has the old time brick paved floor. The walls are three feet thick and the doors are heavy and broad.

Only the two families have lived in this house. Since the Dufours passed away, the Grahams have owned it, and it owes its name of the "Ferry" house to the fact that the Grahams have furnished several dynasties of owners of the ferry boat which has its landing at the foot of the knoll on which it stands.

It is so rambling, illogical and detached, one feels he almost needs a guide and compass to get through it. The third story is reached by the conventional narrow, steep cupboard—like attic stairs. Here in a tiny bedroom containing quaint old furniture, a man is said to have hanged himself in the long ago. Why, no one seems to know. Tradition has it that Robert Dale Owen has embalmed this old house as a haunted place in his *Footsteps on the Boundary of Another World*.

Vevay proudly claims to be the birthplace of Edward Eggleston and the house in which he first saw the light is in a very good state of preservation. It is a two-story brick situated on the main street of the town. You enter a short but broad hall. On the right is a square sitting room with the usual built-in cupboards flanking the old wood mantel. You step back into a long narrow room evidently originally a porch, one end of which is partitioned off into a pantry. A window opening off from the front room very clearly shows this to be an after thought. The kitchen is reached by a raise-up-the-latch-and-walk-in door. Here is the corner cupboard of pioneer times with funny wooden buttons and a back stair with closed-in stair way and eccentric triangular steps that threaten life and limb of all but the most wary. Off the kitchen is an unexpected little room and under the front stair is a queer little dark closet that piqued our imagination as children. One might fancy the youthful Edward's earliest ideas of this. The front stair is easier of ascent than that of most old houses. When you reach the landing you find yourself unable to decide which way you want to go—on towards the front or to the back where an interesting vista through two low-browed rooms ends in a vision of an old flower garden seen through two old small-paned windows that open like doors, on hinges. As this way seems most uniquely promising, you are apt to take it. And one is not disappointed. First, is the tiniest bed room imaginable with a high chest of drawers and a cubby-hole window suggestive of all the fascinating mystery of years of attic accumulation. You pass through an arched opening into a slightly more grown-up room, an ideal place to be lulled to sleep by the patter of the rain upon the roof. Here is found the headwaters, as one might say, of the queer crooked stairs. There is no protecting rail and one thinks with horror of what

might have happened if Mr. Eggleston had been addicted to sleep-walking in his youth. *The Hoosier School Master* would have been an untold tale, and so would *Roxy* and all the rest. The front upper room is large and pleasant with the deep built-in presses flanking the mantel. The deep window seats show the thick walls. Just at the side of the room is a tiny closet-like room that reminds one of an infant in comparison. This is another characteristic of these old houses. The little squeezed up portico over the front door has been torn away—wooden trellis and all—and the tangled old garden that fascinated the childish fancy into imagining all sorts of Alice-in-Wonderland adventures that might take place there has been combed up into modernity. This house is now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. James Miller.

On the corner lot next the Eggleston place is the Knox homestead, about a hundred years old. It is a low-browed two-story framed, feeble with age. An odd narrow porch, hemmed in by an iron rail, runs across the front, the width of the two heavy front doors. Scarcely two rooms in this house are on exactly the same level. You either step up or step down perceptibly or imperceptibly. By deep, shaky steps you go from the little back entry up a stair way that winds to the right and reaches a hall cut up by steps that lead into four rooms, all on different levels. One of them a tiny one with the walls slanting down to the floor and you can stand erect only in the middle of the room. You step from the trellised side porch into an old-fashioned garden where coxcombs, zennias, petunias, etc., used to grow. Here is an old well, now robbed of windlass and sweep. The house is now occupied by a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Culbertson, but in the lifetime of the last owner, it was filled with old fashioned furniture and china. Heavy gilt framed mirrors and old portraits hung on the walls. A grandfather's clock sat in state in the parlor and in fact everything savored strongly of the last century and made an appropriate setting for the gentle mistress herself who in cap and modified hoop skirt, gladly welcomed her guests.

On lower Market street is an old brown frame, jutting out over the sidewalk. It is known as the "Aunt Lucy Detraz" home. This old lady lived to be almost one hundred. She was the daughter of Antoinette Dufour Morerod whose broth-

ers laid out the town of Vevay. From the little trellised porch at the side you step into a low-ceiled rambling house, built in a detached illogical way with three-cornered closets here and there. It originally came to a sort of climax down stairs here and down stairs there, until it landed below the bank. A closed stair leads by a straight and narrow way to the upper rooms. There is a picturesque two story veranda facing the river and it was from this place that "Rev. Whittaker" talked to "Toinette" in *Roxy*. Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Shadday now occupy the house. Mrs. S. is the only daughter of Aunt Lucy.

The homestead known as the "Uncle Aime" Morerod place (Mr. Morerod was Aunt Lucy's brother) is just on the outskirts of the city near the hills. It stands back some distance from the gate and is reached by a winding path. Ascending the stone steps, sunken with age, you pass through the great colonial doorway into a broad hall. There are fifteen rooms not counting halls, entries or closets under the stair. The chair-boarded walls are very thick. The rooms with old-fashioned disregard of convenience do not open into each other but preserve a rigid individuality. You must go out into the hall and start over again. Conservation of energy counted for nothing evidently in the days when this house was built. You descend a flight of steps, walk a few paces and ascend an equal flight and as there is no especial gain to be had except exercise, one feels this should be bridged over.

General John Dumont built this house about a hundred years ago, and here Julia L. Dumont, the famous pioneer school-mistress did her grand work. The historic school-room, now somewhat cut up into other rooms, is on an upper floor and was reached by an outer stair, which is now torn away, yet the door still remains at the rear of the building and testifies to the extreme thickness of the walls. In the great room on the left of the hall on the grained floor are the brass window curtain trimmings. The ceilings are extremely high and the rooms are cool as a cellar in summer and cold as Siberia in winter. Everything is redolent of the past. There is flavor of sadness, of inevitableness, suggestive of human destiny, old age and unfitness to keep up with present day demands, a sort of air of "have-done-ness" and despondent waiting for the hand of the present to tear it down. It is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Leep who have

spent a great deal of money in attempting to lengthen its days of usefulness.

Another old Morerod homestead, built by the father of "Uncle Aime" and "Aunt Lucy" is just a little outside of the corporation below Vevay and faces the river. It stands back from the road and is surrounded by a well-kept lawn sprinkled with cedar trees. The story goes, that when the house was built Mrs. Morerod journeyed to Cincinnati to get these trees to set out and the dealer convinced her it would be best to take tiny cuttings instead of young trees. Imagine the feelings of her husband when he hitched up a two horse wagon to meet her at the boat landing and haul home the trees. The six of them now testify the dealer's judgment was correct. Just this year an old frame addition to the brick nucleus was torn away, this was known as the "ball room." Here, lighted by brass candelabra on the walls, were enacted many lively scenes of pioneer days. One lady came to take a last look at the place where her father and mother first met. The ball room was on the upper floor and was reached by outside stairs. An old wine cellar below contained two mammoth wine casks, one with the capacity of seven hundred gallons, the other of five hundred, and they had to be pulled to pieces to remove them from the cellar. This was done only a few months ago. There was a brick pavement in this cellar and it is said that old Jean Morerod, the builder, took his daughter there and showed where he had dug up a part of the floor and buried his money, in case any unexpected Indian raid should put a period to his existence before he could tell his family where his money was. There was a square place in the floor that looked as if the bricks had been removed. This house is now occupied by Mr. Julia Dupraz and family, descendants of Mrs. Julia L. Dumont.

At the cross roads that lead to Vevay, Madison and Moorefield stands the old Heady home, built a hundred years ago, by a Siebenthal who married one of the sisters of the Dufours who founded Vevay. It is a large brick and has suffered the improvement of a broad cement front porch which replaced the conventional little frame railed one now doing duty at the side. Again, the broad roomy hall and the thick walls and old-time idea of convenience being no factor, shown in the different floor levels. You go up a step or two here

and down a step or two there. There is a great back porch screened into summer kitchen, hood and an unexpected little milk room up a few steps. The stair leading to the upper story is the conventional one found in old houses with a broad landing near the top. There is one great room filled with furniture, breathing of the past, and three smaller ones. The stairs to the garret are so quaint one wonders if the garret was meant to hide in, in pioneer days, it is so unexpected. You see a cupboard-like door in the wall, led up to by two or three steps far apart. You open the door and peep in. There are more steps wide apart, not straight in front but to the side, leading up up, to a mysteriously fascinating darkness. Mr. and Mrs. Heady now own and occupy this interesting old place.

Down the Madison road a short distance is the old Henry place. Through a clover field you come to a tiny brick house, sixty years old and small of its age. It is extremely insignificant in outward appearance; crouching down in an old-fashioned tangled garden, fragrant with roses, pinks and honeysuckle, it gives no signs of the treasures it contains. The garden slopes to the river and a good view of the passing steamers may be had from it. The house contains more rooms than one would imagine; parlor, living room and kitchen stretch in a straight line from the front door and along the side are three tiny bedrooms in a row with no communication with each other.

The house was built by the father of the present occupants, two extremely interesting elderly maiden ladies and their bachelor brother who reminds one of Thoreau. They all might have stepped out from the pages of *Cranford*.

Their father, an ink manufacturer came from England and establishe dan ink manufactory just a step or two from the house. It still stands, the great mixing pot, furnace and all the machinery scattered around rather illogically now, although the old owner was always severely particular about everything being in its place, as those could testify who found his manufactory and him as interesting as a wizard in his workshop whom they watched "inviz." For instance when he used a pair of scissors, he hung them back on their especial nail, immediately and nobody dared touch them. Many

Switzerland county boys with inventive or mechanical turn haunted his place and bear testimony today to his influence.

In a sort of sanctum sanctorum, there is an old static machine and book binding apparatus. Here the sprightly younger daughter carries on that part of her father's trade and binds books for the county.

A queer little ladder-like stair leads to a garret with trunks full of quilts worth going miles to see. There is one sixty years old with eight thousand pieces. Think of it! In this day of club and college for women, could such a thing be done? Such tiny intricate pieces and patterns! And patience!

There is an old chest from across seas, the oak rim of which was made from piles taken from the Thames, and it is said to be four hundred years old. The old manufactory is wooden and has many gables. It is said the owner might have made a fortune, but he confided the secret of his ink mixture to others who cheated him of his patent.

In the houses there are many fine old pieces of furniture—mahogany pedestal tables, chests of drawers and beautiful four posted bedsteads. On a chest of drawers stands a wooden treasure box that looks like one might imagine the ark of the covenant looked.

Out of a tall secretary book case three stories high, they exhumed for us to see an old newspaper published in Ulster county, New York, in 1800. Wonder of wonders it was edged with black mourning for G. Washington. It gave one quite a turn to read the account of his burial as follows:

On Wednesday last, the mortal part of Washington, the Great Father of his Country and Friend of Man, was consigned to the tomb with solemn honors and funeral pomp.

Of minor interest of course was the advertisement for sale of a negro wench. Out of the chest of drawers the dear old ladies brought two dolls, one eighty years old but still interesting and much handsomer than one would think dolls were, so long ago. It had come from England and was dressed in beautiful hand-embroidered baby clothes. The other was sixty years old and the china head was made to represent the style of hair dressing of that time—side curls and back

curls topped by a tight chignon. The dress was in keeping, pantalettes and all.

Then they brought forth their mother's wedding gown, a flowered silk of a quaint old-time color. It is hand-made with stitches so regular and small it is hard to believe they are not machine made. The skirt and sleeves were full and the bodice whale-boned with a broad cape, all suggestive of old family daguerrotypes.

Then they showed us an old flint lock musket of 1814, and struck fire from the hammer. The old thing was so heavy one wondered if there would be much fight left in a fellow who had carried it very far, and thought it was just more proof that "There were giants in those days."

When we stepped into the living room we could almost imagine we were in Whittier's home. Rag carpet and oblong rag rugs covered the floor. An old clock seventy-six years old hangs on the wall, beautiful in line and design. It looks strangely up to date because clocks now-a-days are being built on those same lines. An old wooden settee that had once had rockers and done duty as a cradle, occupied a conspicuous place. Wooden chairs and a wooden rocker of picturesque quaintness and a large heavily framed mirror attract attention as does also a loom for weaving. Old prints hang on the walls, virgin to wall paper. Altogether one feels after a visit to this place as if the pages of history had been turned back sixty years.

A few miles above town is the house built by Judge Elisha Golay ninety-two years ago. It is now occupied by Rev. L. E. Smith. It looks small from the outside but astonishes one at the amount of space inside. There is a brick walk on each side as old as the house. A honeysuckle hedge borders the lawn from which a fine view of the hill may be had. Unaccountable as it may seem, there is a cistern in the cellar.

Of all the old houses this one wears the belt for queer little closets and three cornered cupboards. In one room a little door opens high in the wall and shows three drawers, spoken of by old members of the family as the "secret" drawers. Here, it is said, the old Judge kept his money before the day of banks. In the dining room a picture hangs over a square hole in the wall, strongly suggestive of secret springs. Above the mantel in this same room is another

little door now papered over, and a picture hung above it. One couldn't help but think of the "House of Seven Gables."

The doors are large and heavy and three-paneled, with brass knobs and hinges that run across like bars over the outer doors as against pioneer foes. One of these doors has a latch like a coffee grinder. The broad, cheerful front hall has a stairway inviting one to the upper story where three airy rooms have any number of little closets, some opening into cubby holes.

A short distance farther up the road, is the house built by Constant Golay (son of Judge Elisha) and brother-in-law of "Uncle Aime" Morerod in 1843. The date is marked on the cellar steps. This house has been modernized by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Waltz, and has been converted into quite a handsome residence. The conventional small front portico has been removed and a broad veranda with massive columns has taken its place. The great deep triangular-shaped back porch has remained the same. From it a fine view of the Ohio may be obtained. One of the chief attractions is the broad central hall, running the length of the house, and having a beautiful polished floor. The doors are handsomely panelled with brass knobs, the outer ones have hinges reaching entirely across like bars, as a protection against outer force. The walls are nineteen inches thick.

The house now owned by the parents of Will Stevens, and C. D. Stevens of University of Cincinnati (coming into some fame as a landscape artist) is more than seventy years old, but is in excellent repair, and like a well-preserved individual is all the more interesting on account of its experiences, as it has lost all the crudeness of youth. It is situated in Vevay on lower Market street on the site of the first bank. The front door, presided over by a trim little portico, is reached by a flight of stone steps. Through this colonial door you enter a broad hall running the length of the house and opening at the rear on a wide veranda, two stories in height. From this veranda, with its great Doric columns, one has a fine view of the Ohio and the distant Kentucky hills.

It overlooks an artistically planned flower garden, which by terraces, slopes to the meadows that border the river. There are phlox, sweet pinks and other old fashioned flowers,

and a rose bower with rustic seats. Then there is a sundial built of the material of the first soda fountain in Vevay.

The house is furnished in exquisite keeping. The kitchen and dining room are in the basement. The latter is especially attractive with its small-paned windows opening on hinges, its three cornered cupboard built in the wall, and most charming of all—above the mantel a picturesque view of the Ohio, a wall decoration by the artist son of the owner. From the kitchen you have the novel experience of going up three or four steps to the cellar which is cool and sweet-smelling.

Another interesting old house is the Schenck house, also on Market street, with its back to the river. It is a three story brick with the customary small front porch though the stone pillars are large and massive. A broad hall runs the length of the house and opens on a broad veranda at the rear overlooking the Ohio. This veranda also has heavy stone pillars and is three stories in height. It can be seen far away on the river and is an old landmark. Spacious double parlors are on each side of the hall. The lofty ceilings give palatial proportions. Its crowning glory is the beautiful spiral stair winding “up, up uppy” like the one in the fairy story but instead of finding “Boo” at the top, there is a queer old attic with the most interesting old hair-covered trunks and derelicts of all kinds.

On the way to the attic where the old family “has beens” repose one reaches the second story as one might naturally suppose. Here, again is the broad hall the entire length of the house opening on a sort of Romeo and Juliet balcony in front and in the back on the broad veranda before-mentioned, and great airy bedrooms on each side. By a closed stair the basement is reached. Again the broad hall with the dining room on one side with its quaint Delft tiles and on the other the big kitchen. Some interesting old furniture is found in this house, now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Will Fry. There are at least half a dozen more old homesteads in and about Vevay fully as interesting.